l:Griffiths M-5 (ca. 1940) 1946 AW37 Kol AW37

PLATE XXIII

137
342
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A Village shrine near Sihora. The Panda stands at the right. The shrine is at the base of a Nim tree.

[298]

A closer view. Note the iron lash, Salagrama stone, flags and spiked sandals.

[facing p. 137]

1:Griffiths M-5 (ca. 1940) 1946 AW37 Kol AW37

are made, the animal should be of a black colour. Black glass bangles will also be attached to her part of the shrine or found where she is worshipped. She likes the Tulasi plant and sometimes lives in it.

Occasionally she is a household goddess and is worshipped along with other household deities.

When the spirit of Kali possesses a worshipper, he can walk without discomfort or injury on spiked sandals.[1]

Kalka. Is one of Sharda's six sisters. She is seldom invoked, for according to Kols, when Shardamai or Kalimai are worshipped she is happy and pleased.

Khermai. This *devi* is probably the one most frequently worshipped by Kols. The Census Report classes her as the Earth Goddess[2] and Crooke[3] believes Khera to be the same as Khetrpal, the field guardian. Sometimes it would appear that the term included many kinds of deities such as Kali and Sitalamai. Her shrine is found in or near every Kol village, and she is always mentioned; it is also frequently claimed that she must be considered first, subsequently any others that one might choose. Sometimes she is called Bhagavati and is said to be the best mediator between men and Bhagawan, for if she is kept pleased and contented, one does not have to worry about Bhagawan.

Khermai's duties are manifold. She is the village watchman and protector. She wards off evil spirits and prevents their entry into the village. Sometimes her shrine is placed at the south of the village to ward off the evil spirits which so frequently come from that direction. In times of illness, she is invoked, and is thought to be intimately connected with disease; when one has smallpox she is worshipped in the person who is stricken. Cholera and smallpox are sometimes said to come directly from Bhagawan, and she is the best protector in case he sends them. On such occasions she should be given a libation of water and the village may be "tied" with her help.[4]

She is thought to help the Kols in all kinds of difficulties; she guards a man going on a journey; as he leaves, he may promise her an offering of a cocoanut which he will give if he returns safely. At set times she possesses her devotees, and through them reveals her will and answers their questions on problems confronting them. The sure test of her presence is the power to thrust an iron trident through the tongue or cheek.

1 See pp. 148, 169.
2 *Census of India*, 1911. XIII, p. 98.
3 Crooke, W., *Religion and Folklore of Northern India*, pp. 92, 93.
4 See Chapter IX, Tying the Village.

1:Griffiths M-5 (ca. 1940) 1946 AW37 Kol AW37

778 411 [785 787] are very common. The trident with the sharp point is used at the time the *panda* or another is possessed of Khermai, and is pierced through the tongue or cheek.

3. *Spiked Sandals* (*Kharau*). Every well-equipped shrine should 778 787 have at least one pair of spiked sandals. These are made of pieces of wood in the shape of the sole of a shoe with sharp spikes driven through so that the person walking on them stands on the points. There is a 292 wooden peg toward the front of each which fits between the big toe and the next and holds the sandal on the foot. These are generally used at the time of the trance. When the spirit of Kalimai possesses a man, it will be evidenced by his desire to put on these sandals and jump about in them.

778 785 787 [412] 4. *Iron Tongs* (*Chimta*). There is also another kind of iron instrument found in these shrines: iron tongs used for taking coals out of the fire. When Sannyasi *deo* comes upon a man he will take the tongs and beat himself with them. Hindu ascetics usually carry tongs.

5. *Iron Lash* (*Gurda*). This is a sort of magic chain made of iron links barbed with bits of steel. The handle by which it is grasped is also iron. During the *haws*, if one is possessed (particularly by Bhuiyan *deo*), he will pick up this chain and lash himself till the blood comes. If some person, possessed of an evil spirit, is brought before the shrine, and the *panda* in his trance recognizes the reality of the spirit possession, he will attempt to cast out the spirit by lashing the unfortunate man.

6. *Iron Nails*. Some bits of iron or iron nails are usually found somewhere about the shrine. These serve a dual purpose: they are tests for Khermai, and one possessed of her can stick them into his flesh without pain or discomfort. They are also used to frighten away evil spirits who may make a disturbance, and are sometimes flung in their direction causing them to fly away.

7. *A Bed of Spikes* (*Palna*). Often a bed of spikes is found in connection with these shrines. This too is to test spirit possession. 778 One possessed of Kali will seek to use the bed of spikes.

[777 237] 8. *A Ram's Horn* is sometimes found. It is lucky to have one and it protects the shrine.

9. *Clay Lamps* (*Dip*). Clay dishes into which oil is poured and [354] wicks attached are also found at all shrines. Sweet oil and incense are mixed, and during the time of worship two or three of these are lighted and kept burning. The *panda* lights and cares for them.

[789] 10. *Ashes* (*Rakha*). A pile of ashes is always found somewhere about the shrine. This is a good protective device against evil spirits.

1:Griffiths M-5 (ca.1940) 1946 AW37 Kol AW37

even death are often traced to this influence. A woman is more likely to have an evil eye than a man. Kols believe that Gond women should be avoided as far as possible for many of them are said to have an evil eye that is likely to affect children. A well-dressed person is more likely to be affected than a poorly dressed one, and to put on fine clothes is to attract attention and therefore invite danger.

The evil eye may also be directed against animals and plants; so a bad crop, or the illness or death of an animal, may be due to some one with an evil eye. Pumpkins are often trained to grow upon the roof of Kol houses and may be protected from the evil eye by white-washing an ordinary flat tile, making a cross in the centre with lamp-black, and putting upon the tile as many dots as there are pumpkins growing upon the roof. This will protect them and no pumpkin will rot. A rotted pumpkin is the sure sign of the activity of this mysterious force.

The time of eating is a particularly dangerous one from the point of view of the evil eye. No stranger should come into the presence of one who is taking his meal, and at that time he should turn his back on all people, including even the members of his own household. If one possessed of the evil eye should see the face of a person taking his food it may have a serious result. Therefore it is wise never to interrupt a man at his meals; this a stranger will never do. If accidentally confronted in this way, the eater should stop his meal and wait till the person has passed out of sight. To be seen in the act of putting on new clothes is also to expose oneself to the dangers of the evil eye, should such a person happen by.

WHAT THESE FORCES DO. We have seen something of the supernormal powers which the average Kol feels are all about him. What do these powers bring to pass? Some indication of this has been given already, but more may be stated. Diseases, particularly wasting diseases, are surely due to the presence of evil spirits or the spell of the evil eye. Any mysterious disease may be ascribed to these powers. Ill luck is also due to the attention of the forces named above. A man may be tripped up: it is the work of a spirit; he cuts his hand: a *bhut* directed the axe. We were told of a certain evil spirit dwelling in a banyan tree on the Great Deccan Road near Katni. He was particularly annoyed by cyclists: probably he could not get used to the march of civilization. This spirit was especially active at midday and midnight, and if a cyclist should fail to show respect, by not dismounting and walking by the tree at those particular hours, he was sure to be killed. It was commonly reported

Griffiths M-5 (ca. 1940) 1946 AW37 Kol AW37

Dancing is invariably accompanied by singing and drumming. Liquor is often consumed in connection with it, and in one place, when seeking to see a dance, we were told that they would give an exhibition only if we bought them some liquor. The intoxicated state also lends aid to elopement.

The *dadra* dance is the most popular and most Kol dances are purely *dadras*. On such an occasion the men first gather around in the evening and sing and play for an hour or so. Finally a few women, one to six in number, put on the dancing costume over their *saris*, for without this they will not dance. This costume consists of two pieces: a red and yellow *lahanga*, which is like a dress made of many folds and is tied at the top so that the bottom just sweeps the ground, leaving the feet barely visible. The head is covered with the second portion, the *chunariya*, a shawl made of the same material as the *lahanga*. The shawl is thrown over the head and is held by the left hand so that when the person is standing erect the face is covered. On the feet are *ghunghunis*, ankle bracelets, which make a jingling sound.

After putting on the dancing costume, which is usually done right before those present, the dancers go and stand facing the players. If there are several who are to dance they do not necessarily go at the same time, and when they get there they do not keep together in their movements. While one is standing the other may be whirling. The dancers usually stand for some minutes in silence in front of the players who are singing to them and coaxing them to begin their dance. Then the knee is slightly bowed and the dancer begins to whirl. If one starts this movement in a clockwise direction, that direction is apparently followed by all the dancers, and the other direction is not taken. On the other hand, if they begin with the counter-clockwise movement then that is retained for the evening. On the whole the clockwise movement is favoured and is mostly used, but it is said that there is no hard and fast rule about it. The dancer may turn a number of times, but there is no set number of turns, it must fit into the song. The whirling is not particularly rapid, nor is it done on the heel. Having completed the revolutions the dancer stops, facing the drummers and the male singers, and begins her song. The men cease from their singing, but accompany her on their drums. As the dancer sings she moves by slow steps first to the left and then to the right, but not more than four or five feet in either direction from the original position. As the feet move the legs are shaken so that the anklets make a jingling sound. As a rule the shawl is held closed by the left hand, but when bending over the left hand is kept free, and it is used along with the